

Copper mine leaching not yet cleaned up

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It's not over until it's over.

That's the bottom line of statements from two spokesmen for an organization which pressured the provincial government to take steps to halt acid leaching from the area of a disused copper mine on Mount Washington.

The two officials said work was started on the mountainside last year but local conditions meant the program had to be abandoned early for the winter and it may well not restart for perhaps another four months.

Both B.C. Steelhead Society

president Rory Glennie and Father Charles Brandt said last week that the clear period when the work can be done is likely to be short because of snow and, as bad for the contractor, rain.

Brandt, who is chairman of the Tsolum River enhancement committee under the Steelhead Society's Comox Valley chapter, agreed with Glennie in indicating some disappointment that more had not been able to be done last year, but both also indicated some sympathy for the problems which the Prince George contractor carrying out the work for the provincial government has been facing.

Work on Mt. Washington mine site a long process

They said the objective of the 1600,000 program is to prevent waste rock piles and exposed rock at the old mine site from creating acid which then leaches out copper. The copper is then carried downstream by rainfall into the Tsolum River via various tributaries.

To do that, the pair explained, limestone was hauled in from

Texada Island to help neutralize the acid-generating rock, waste piles were levelled- and then the surface was given a coating of water-resistant, clay-like till, which was trucked in from elsewhere on the mountain.

The till is used to seal out the rain and air which are vital parts of the acid-generating process.

Glennie and Brandt said, how

ever, that the till has to be fairly dry for it to be spread easily by heavy equipment. The operation bogged down and the work was hampered when the rains came last fall. After that came the usual winter snow, which put an end to the project and is not expected to melt sufficiently for a resumption until about June.

Some work was completed to seal off the acid rock but not all of the rock has been covered to the full depth of one metre.

Even once the full cover is in place, both men stressed, the technology being used is in the experimental and unproven stage and there is no assurance it will be successful.

They said the government is monitoring the downstream receiving waters in creeks running into the Tsolum, in the river itself and in the Puntledge into which the Tsolum empties.

Overall, said Brandt this week, it could be three years before it is known just how successful or otherwise the capping program has been on about 8 hectares of the mountainside.

And once the quality of water is restored in the Tsolum and obviously not before, said the two men, a small federal fish hatchery on Headquarters Creek — a tributary to the Tsolum — can be used to regenerate fish stocks for the Tsolum system.